

"Years Of Work" Paying Off For Roxana Football Program

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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ROXANA - "It's a lot bigger than winning and losing on a Friday night," Roxana football head coach Wade DeVries said Friday morning on Riverbender.com's 'Our Daily Show!'.

DeVries, now in his sixth season with the Shells, knows that it's not all about X's and O's or the result on the field; it's about athletes supporting other athletes.

"It's the kids' willingness to buy into this philosophy," DeVries said. "They don't just embrace it, but now it's a part of our culture. It's kind of a cliché word, but that's kind of who we are."

With student-driven support doesn't always come great success, but it has worked out for the Shells' football program.

After a 7-4 season a year ago, the Shells have done something special in 2023 as they remain undefeated at 11-0, their first undefeated regular season since 2003.

With success, usually comes an outpouring of local support.

"It's tremendous," DeVries said. "It was tremendous even two years ago when we were 2-7. And last year, to take some steps forward, win a playoff game, host a playoff game; you're really seeing it come out with the tailgates and packing the stands."

And the Shells pay it forward to the community.

Just this morning high school football players [welcomed elementary students](#) at Roxana Central Intermediate. According to DeVries, his team will go over and eat lunch and enjoy recess with the younger kids, trying to build lasting relationships with the community.

On the field, the Shells knew they had something special after returning most of the team from last year, but didn't know quite how special it would be.

"We knew we had an opportunity to be really really hard to beat, and that's all you can ask for in football," DeVries said. "If you would have asked me if we were going to clock almost everyone, I certainly would not have expected all those 40-point wins."

Roxana has outscored their opponents 514-171.

But how did the program get here?

DeVries became head coach in 2018 and went 2-7 his first season. The following year the Shells made the playoffs but lost a round-one matchup, ending the season 5-5.

In a 2020, pandemic-shortened season, the Shells went 2-4 and then 2-7 in 2021.

It wasn't until last year that the team climbed back into the playoffs after a 6-3 regular season.

DeVries knew that things were beginning to fall into place, with his players and the support from his administration.

"The transition probably started four years ago when we transformed our weight room," DeVries mentioned. "Now we have the Welker Wellness Center which is one of the elite training facilities in the area, probably in the state. We were able to transform the game fields, the football/soccer fields being turfed."

"It's been a slow fight, but we've really been able to put the systems in place," he continued. "Being able to really showcase all the great things that are happening there that get overlooked when you go 2-7 or 7-4. Those great things were still happening two years ago when we were 2-7, they were happening last year and I think we saw a glimpse of it."

"It's more than a program, it's tied in so much with the community, with the school, with the administration, with the teachers, with the student body, it's all tied in together."

It also helps to have naturally gifted athletes.

Roxana, with an enrollment of around 500 students, sees a constant theme of multi-sport athletes.

Many football players go straight into basketball in the winter and either play baseball or run track and field in the spring.

DeVries loves this and thoroughly encourages it.

"The expectation is that we have kids that do multiple sports," he said. "Because you can strength train and sprint train and do anything you want, but playing sports and being competitive, there's nothing like it. There's nothing that can train you for that other than just doing it."

DeVries began coaching in 2007 and knows one thing, it's not about having one or two break-out seasons, it's about constant success.

"That's the goal. We don't want to be a blip. Our goal is sustainability."

It's something the program hasn't seen since the early 2000s under head coach Bill Smith who led the Shells to three straight playoff appearances from 2001-2003 or back to the late 1970s and 1980s under Charles Raich when Roxana made the playoffs 11 times in 18 seasons from 1976-1993.

The last time the Shells made the playoffs in back-to-back seasons was in 2014-2015 under head coach Pat Keith who is now leading Piasa Southwestern.

But the tides are changing in Roxana.

The program's hard work and the administration's support are beginning to pay off.

"It's really great to finally promote it and show what has been going on because this is years of work," DeVries said.

Check out Riverbender.com's [game preview](#) and find out [how to watch](#) Roxana's quarterfinal game on the road at Stanford Olympia. The Spartans host the Shells at 2 p. m. on Saturday, Nov. 11.